UNWTO Strengthens Relationship with Israel During Official Visit

Innovation, tourism for rural development and high-level cooperation were the focus of this week’s official visit of the UNWTO Secretary-General to Israel.

As a founding Member State, joining in 1975, Israel has played an active role in UNWTO’s work and continues to serve on several important Committees and bodies. Following on from the official visit of Israel’s Ministry of Tourism, to the UNWTO headquarters in Madrid in July, the UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili led a delegation to Israel for a series of high-level discussions around shared priorities.

In Jerusalem, Secretary-General Pololikashvili held a bilateral meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel Eli Cohen. Mr Pololikashvili commended Israel’s active role in tourism governance and its commitment to several UNWTO priorities for the sector.

• Israel is an elected member of the Task Force on Redesigning Tourism for Future. Alongside Spain, Israel was chosen to represent the region of Europe in this UNWTO subsidiary body.

• Israel also serves as member of the UNWTO Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness for the period 2019-2023.

• Discussions explored possibilities of deepening relations with Israel around shared priorities for tourism. The focus here was on topics including tourism innovation and entrepreneurship and also investments in tourism.

Also in Jerusalem, Secretary-General Pololikashvili and the UNWTO delegation received a warm welcome at the Ministry of Tourism, to discuss the deepening of cooperation between UNWTO and Israel. Discussions focused on shared priorities for tourism both in the country and across the wider region, most notably education, innovations, sustainability, data collection, accessibility, legal instruments.
Tourism for Rural Development: Israel's Best Tourism Villages

To conclude the official visit, the UNWTO delegation visited Kfar Kama, named as one of the Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO in 2022. The village was given the award in recognition of its commitment to harnessing the power of tourism to preserve and celebrate its unique local culture. The Israeli village of Neot Semadar was also selected to be part of the Best Tourism Villages Upgrade Programme.

Advancing Tourism Innovation

Recognizing Israel's focus on innovation and digital transformation, the UNWTO delegation met with leading representatives of the country's start-up community. Led by UNWTO Executive Director Natalia Bayona, the delegation worked with local innovators to identify the benefits that innovation and digital transformation can deliver both within tourism and in other economic sectors.

- UNWTO invited the start-up community to take advantage of its leading support network for innovators, including the various UNWTO innovation programs and competitions.
- To date, Israel participated in all UNWTO global competitions and challenges with 7 winners selected from more than 150 applicants.
- Executive Director Bayona led discussions exploring potential opportunities to further cooperate on capacity building, training and sharing knowledge related to the innovation expertise the country has when it comes to startups, entrepreneurship in the tourism sector and how they can mentor others to scale up their projects.

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